

## What inspired ECHO?

I was researching what I thought would be my next novel about a little known discrimination case in California in 1931, *Roberto Alvarez vs. the Lemon Grove School District*. It was the nation's first successful desegregation court case. While I was looking through archives at the historical society in Lemon Grove, CA, I came across a photo from the early 1930s of a classroom of students sitting on the steps of the school, each holding a harmonica. When I asked about the odd photograph, the docent, who had attended that very school said, "That was our elementary school harmonica band. Almost every school had one in the 20s and 30s during the big harmonica band movement."

There was a harmonica band movement? My curiosity leaped. I went home and began to research. Not only was there a harmonica band movement in the United States, but also Alfred Hoxie's then-famous Philadelphia Harmonica Band of Wizards, the 60 member band of boys who played in Charles Lindbergh's parade, and for three presidents. And the band used, primarily, one harmonica—the same model of harmonica in the picture of the children on the steps of the country school—the Hohner Marine Band.

I began to wonder about the children in that country school, and in Hoxie's band. Two fictional characters and their stories began to take shape. Mike, an orphan boy in Philadelphia who wanted to be in Hoxie's band, which by the way, WAS full of orphans. And Ivy Maria, a girl in a country school harmonica band. I began to wonder, too, if by some odd fate, my characters, at different points in time, had played the same harmonica? And if it *that* was true, could someone have owned it before them?

I found the answer when I traveled to the Hohner Harmonica company in Trossingen, Germany, to tour the campus and museum of the largest and one of the oldest harmonica factories in the world. There, I learned about the young apprentices who worked in the factory before WWII. Another character's story, Friedrich's, began to unfold.

Since my characters would live through some of the most challenging times in history—Hitler's Germany, the Great Depression, and segregation—I began to wonder how music might contribute in some way to their ability to carry on through fear and darkness? I began to imagine the *harmonica's* back story, and the magic it might carry. That is how Friedrich's and Mike's and Ivy's stories became framed in an original fairy tale and entwined in a witch's curse and a midwife's prophecy.

In the end, the story I set out to write became a small part of a much larger narrative that demanded to be written.