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Dr. Mous Chahine
Chief Scientist
Jet Propulsion Laboratory
4800 Oak Grove Drive
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October 30, 1997

Re: Formal Recognition to Dr. Michael A. Minovitch
for Inventing Gravity-Assist Interplanetary Space Travel

Dear Dr. Chahine:

During the summer of 1961, while working at JPL as a temporary graduate student in mathematics from UCLA, I invented a new method for exploring the Solar System. It was based upon replacing direct-transfer trajectories to a target planet using reaction propulsion -- that was taken for granted at that time -- with indirect trajectories passing one or more intermediate planets so that the spacecraft can be propelled by the resulting gravitational interactions. As you know, this method has turned out to be much more practical for reaching the high velocities required for exploring most of the Solar System than the one based upon the traditional reaction propulsion methods laid down by the early pioneers.

Naturally, I assumed that eventually JPL/Caltech would give me proper official credit for the invention, but this has still not happened. At this point, I am taking the position that since JPL has been very busy using my method for exploring most of the Solar System, they have simply forgotten about the inventor. Although I am very happy that my invention was used so much by JPL, I am now quite concerned about the fact that I have still not received proper official credit for it.

Several members of JPL's technical staff share my concern. Recently, Dr. Sam Dallas and Rex Ridenoure brought this fact to the attention of JPL's Deputy Director, Dr. Larry Dumas. Dumas indicated that he discussed this situation with you, and with Dr. Stone. But Dumas indicated that you offered a practical solution that is essentially the standard method for crediting the inventor of an important invention. As you pointed out, the method is to simply let the "peer-review" process determine if an invention were really new, and who invented it. After this is determined, the originating institution makes the official award nomination, and this procedure should be applied in my case.

I am happy to inform you that this condition was met several years ago. I describe the details in a copy of the letter to Dumas enclosed herein. I am therefore asking you, as JPL's Chief Scientist to advise Dr. Stone that the standard condition that you suggested has been met, and that the award for the invention is now quite proper for JPL/Caltech to make.

Respectfully yours,


Dr. Michael A. Minovitch

Enclosure: Copy of letter to Dr. Larry Dumas dated October 30, 1997 with 50 enclosures.