

JOHN KOBLER
R. F. D. NO. 4
WESTPORT, CONN.

July 17, 1951

Prof. Leo Szilard
University of Chicago
Chicago, Ill.

Dear Prof. Szilard:

By the time you receive this letter, you will probably also have heard from Mr. Morton Adams.

When I learned through Mr. Adams the remarkable work which you did in connection with filing that patent, the famous letter to Pres. Roosevelt, etc., I felt strongly that this story should be told. To my knowledge, your role in all this and your present position and work is not fully understood.

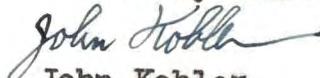
I have written a good many articles for LIFE, among other magazines, and as matters now stand the editors of LIFE share my enthusiasm.

If, therefore, as Mr. Adams has kindly suggested, that you would be willing to receive me, I will plan within the next week or so to come to Chicago or wherever you may be located.

You may be sure that the subject would be treated with the greatest dignity and respect and that all scientific and factual references would be carefully checked with you.

As soon as I reach a definite arrangement with LIFE, I will try to reach you by telephone.

Sincerely Yours,


John Kobler

JOHN KOBLER
R. F. D. NO. 4
WESTPORT, CONN.

2-2148

July 19, 1951

Prof. Leo Szilard
Park Lane Hotel
Denver, Col.

Dear Prof. Szilard:

After speaking to you today, it occurred to me that the most comfortable arrangement might be for you to spend two or three days with us right here in Westport. We will be able to make you quite comfortable and between swims and other cooling activities, we should be able to get the facts down with minimum effort.

What I plan to do is an article which will tell in its entirety for the first time the extraordinary role you played leading up to the Manhattan Project. There are so many things here which the average American does not understand. I speak of the historical events, rather than the actual scientific intricacies.

I would then want to end the article with an account of your ideas about outlawing atomic warfare, your open letter to Stalin, etc.

I will be in Washington until Wednesday or Thursday. If you would be good enough to inform my wife of your arrival at the King's Crown Hotel, she will get in touch with me and I will telephone you. Possibly we could plan on spending the next weekend together.

In case this letter misses you, I am sending a duplicate to the King's Crown Hotel. If there is anything further you wish to know about me, I suggest you telephone Mr. Cal Whipple at Life (JU 6-1212).

Sincerely Yours,

John Kobler

JOHN KOBLER
R. F. D. NO. 4
WESTPORT, CONN.

P. S. There is one factor you may want to consider regarding where we should meet. Sometimes, in writing about a man, it is helpful to see him against his normal background, lab., family etc. This is not essential in this case. I merely suggest it to you, as certainly something of your life and personality properly belongs in the article.

July 25, 1951

Mr. John Kobler
R.F.D. No. 4
Westport, Conn.

Dear Mr. Kobler:

Sunday I sent you a telegram, as follows:

"Re your letter July 19th, have postponed trip East but shall give whole matter serious consideration and shall keep in touch with you."

In the meantime, I talked with Norman Cousins over the telephone, and he has strongly urged me to try to work with you on this project for LIFE magazine.

It so happens that I am engaged at present in sorting out old documents relating to the beginnings of the Manhattan Project. I have most of the documents, if not all, with me here in Denver, and I hope to have ready two complete sets of copies rather soon.

According to present plans, I shall be in New York after Labor Day, and I may stay there until the 15th. This might well be the best time for us to get together, and your kind suggestion of having me out at Westport might prove to be the best way for us to work undisturbed for a few days. If you are planning a trip West before that time, we could meet earlier in Colorado and find a retreat here somewhere for a few days.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

LS:hw

September 28, 1951

Mr. John Kobler
Westport, Connecticut

R.F.D No 4

Dear Mr. Kobler:

Concerning the article in which Life magazine might be interested, it seems that it will be possible for me to make an arrangement with the University regarding the University's participation in a fee that I might be paid. I intend to try to put down on paper something, and if I succeed in doing so and if it looks to me half-way satisfactory, I will send it on to you.

It occurs to me that we ought to have some understanding covering both alternatives; either that the article appears under your name and mine jointly, or else that it appears under my name alone. How would you feel about the following: If the article which I send you requires considerable working over and therefore represents your work as well as mine, the article ought to appear under both of our names and the fee should be divided between us 50/50. Otherwise if the article appears under my name alone, one-third of the fee shall go to you and two-thirds shall go to me. Whatever participation the University of Chicago may have will, of course, have to come out of my share of the fee.

Please let me hear from you at your convenience.

Sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

JOHN KOBLER
R. F. D. NO. 4
WESTPORT, CONN.

Oct. 3, 1951

Dr. Leo Szilard
University of Chicago
Chicago 37, Ill.

Dear Dr. Szilard:

I have had a change of heart and prefer to drop the project.

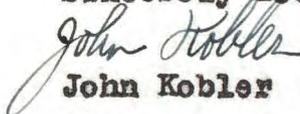
I have returned to my original opinion, one in which I am sure LIFE would in the end concur, that for maximum effectiveness and good taste such an article should be written objectively, in the third person, by a competent journalist.

In any event, I am not a ghostwriter. I do not care to write an article under any name but my own.

This is quite aside from the question of payment. In return for your material and technical assistance you would, as I told you, receive half of what would undoubtedly be a very attractive payment (~~write~~ in addition to whatever emotional satisfaction you might derive from an article properly respectful of your accomplishments and distinction). Under no circumstances would I have agreed to accept less than half.

However, this is now academic. I feel sure you will be happier without my involvement. The friendliest suggestion I can make is that you go ahead and write the article or book in your own way, under your own name. If successful, you will require no help from me and will be free to retain all profits. If not, you can perhaps still employ some ghostwriter.

Sincerely Yours,


John Kobler

5650 Ellis Avenue

October 5, 1951

Mr. John Kobler
R.F.D. #4
Westport, Connecticut

Dear Mr. Kobler:

I was sorry to see from your letter of October 3rd that you changed your mind and reverted to your original proposal.

While I am not too familiar with the terms of the trade, I hardly think that the suggestion that I made in my last letter involved your acting as a ghost writer.

In that letter I discussed two alternatives. One was that the story I would send you meets with your approval and is--as it stands--acceptable to Life. In this case it was necessary to make some provision for compensating you for the trouble which you had already taken in this matter. Your role in this case would have been that of a literary agent ex post facto.

The other alternative was that the story I would send you does not meet with your approval and that you and I would have to write the story jointly under both of our names. I realize that this alternative might have been difficult to carry through, but I should not have thought that it would put you in the position of a ghost writer.

Incidentally, I occasionally indulge in writing "fiction" and you will find enclosed a sample which you might care to read.

Mr. John Kobler

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October 5, 1951

I regret that we were not able to reach a meeting of the minds.

With best wishes,

Very sincerely yours,

Leo Szilard

LS/sds
Enclosure

JOHN KOBLER
R. F. D. NO. 4
WESTPORT, CONN.

Oct. 9, 1951

Dear Dr. Szilard:

Far less am I a literary agent . . .

The point I have not made clear to you is this: if the article were to contain the facts as you outlined them to me, they could not conceivably be properly told by you in the first person. If the article omitted them, then it would not as fascinating an article as I imagined.

I will, of course, be glad to read anything you care to write, but, believe me, I can see no method of preparing this article, at least for LIFE or a magazine of equivalent stature, except as I have suggested.

Sincerely,



P.S. Thank you for the fiction which I read with great interest.