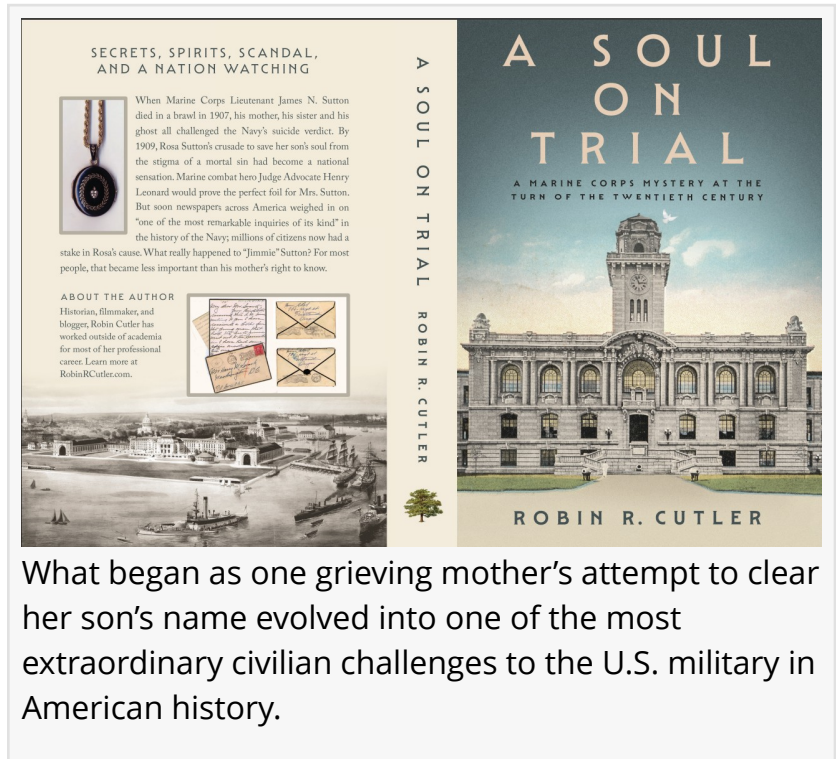


Military Mother's Quest to Clear Son's Name Rallies a Nation in Riveting True Story, A Soul on Trial

Historian Robin Cutler uncovers the remarkable true story of Rosa Sutton, whose fight for justice became a cultural touchstone at the dawn of the 20th century.

OAKLAND, CA, UNITED STATES, July 1, 2026 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The grounds of Arlington National Cemetery are nearly deserted on this clear September afternoon in 1909. But just off McKinley Drive in the southwest corner of the officers' section, eight laborers raise a casket from lot 2102. Rosa Sutton watches from a nearby carriage. For the first time in four years, she is about to see her son.



What began as one grieving mother's attempt to clear her son's name evolved into one of the most extraordinary civilian challenges to the U.S. military in American history.

[A Soul on Trial](#): A Marine Corps Mystery at the Turn of the Twentieth Century (2nd Edition), by historian Robin Cutler, is the true story of Rosa Brant Sutton, who traveled 3,000 miles from

Portland, Oregon, to Annapolis, Maryland, to challenge the Navy's suicide finding after her oldest son died in a brawl. Inspired by her Catholic faith and alleged postmortem visits from her beloved son, Jimmie, she embarked on a crusade to save his soul from the stigma of a mortal sin — a sin that would keep him out of heaven.

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Rosa was a private citizen taking on big government. She may have been the first mother to confront the armed forces in a military forum.”

Historian and author Robin Cutler

“It's an unforgettable story of a military mother desperate to learn what really happened to her son,” said Cutler, who is Rosa's great-granddaughter. “Rosa was a private citizen taking on big government. She may have been the first

mother to confront the armed forces in a military forum.”

Rosa’s spiritual journey soon became a political one that took her through the corridors of power in Washington, D.C., to a courtroom in Annapolis and finally face-to-face with Jimmie’s corpse in Arlington National Cemetery.

This unprecedented conflict between democratic values and military justice unfolded on a national stage thanks to Progressive Era journalists who found the story irresistible. By 1909, millions of citizens, attorneys, military officials and members of Congress had a stake in the fate of a patriotic mother who dared to challenge her own government.

To save her son’s reputation and defend her own sanity, Rosa ultimately enlisted the help of James Cardinal Gibbons, the highest official in the American Catholic Church, and Dr. James Hervey Hyslop, America’s foremost psychical researcher, who commissioned a detailed field study of Rosa’s paranormal experiences. With the press corps serving as a catalyst, these two men helped Rosa achieve an American brand of justice, as well as redemption for both Jimmie and herself.

A compelling murder mystery, ghost story and courtroom drama, *A Soul on Trial* is also, above all, a story of how the First Amendment equipped a mother to pursue justice over a century ago and continues to do so today.

As H. Michael Gelfand wrote in the [Journal of American History](#), *A Soul on Trial* explores “one of the most remarkable cases of a civilian challenging the power of the U.S. military in American history ... [and it is] a testament to the power that one ordinary individual can wield when determined to seek justice.”

Did Lieutenant Sutton commit suicide? Cutler had this to say: “That turned out to be a far more complex question than I first realized. I discovered hundreds of documents that had never been mined before at the National Archives. Readers can play detective as they follow the many threads in this search for the elusive truth. For most people, what happened to Jimmie Sutton became less important than his mother’s right to know.”



Historian and author Robin Cutler is Rosa Sutton's great-granddaughter.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cutler's career as a public historian includes working for the National Endowment for the Humanities, co-producing an Emmy-nominated dramatic series for PBS, collaborating with several Native American tribes to chronicle their histories and culture on film and video, and publishing three nonfiction books. Such Mad Fun, the story of her mother, Jane Hall's, early life and screenwriting career was featured in Vanity Fair and The Daily Beast. She holds a Ph.D. in political science from Columbia University. After many years in New York City and Washington, D.C., she now lives and works in California near her daughters and grandsons.

For much more information and a gallery of pictures related to this story, please visit <https://robinrcutler.com/>.

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