As I stood there looking at the large map on the wall outside the hearing room, I was sure it was all over. The arbitration hearing hadn't even begun, yet I knew I was going to lose and it was my fault. Just a few minutes before, I had been confident, pumped up and ready to rock and roll. But now I was keenly aware that I had committed a classic blunder in preparing for the arbitration hearing. I had not gone out to the “scene of the crime” to view it in person, and now I was going to pay the price for that mistake. The fact that none of the stewards who had handled the case at the earlier steps of the grievance procedure had gone to the scene or had provided a photo or diagram of it did not excuse my negligence—it only compounded it. I should have known better, and the sinking feeling I had in my stomach made me wish I was back at my unit in my uniform casing mail instead of standing outside of a hearing room in a suit waiting for the hearing to begin.

The grievance I was about to advocate was challenging a seven-day suspension issued to a carrier for driving through an intersection with the door of his postal vehicle open, a violation of postal safety regulations. The carrier had been issued a letter of warning for the same offense less than six months before, so this time management had increased the penalty.

The grievant admitted that he’d had his door open when he drove through the intersection, knowing that his supervisor was directly behind him performing street supervision. He said that he’d done so because he didn’t think that intersection was the kind of intersection for which the door needed to be closed. The file noted that this was not your typical “+” intersection where two roads cross each other, but was a “T,” where one of the roads did not continue on the other side. His defense, and the defense by the local union, was that a “T” was not a true intersection and so the grievant should not have been disciplined for driving through it with his door open. Management had main-