The ambition of an immigrant’s son and a BU president’s confidence led to an American success story—and an endowed scholarship.

EARLY EVERY MORNING throughout the 1920s and 1930s, Eleftherios Parasco boarded the trolley in Saugus and headed off to his job at the Lenox Hotel in Boston. Eleftherios shined shoes and dispensed towels at the Lenox, back in the days when the hotel was favored by traveling salesmen, who descended on the hotel in large numbers from the nearby Back Bay train station.

At the time, Boston University’s administration offices and the College of Liberal Arts were on Boylston Street, and one of Eleftherios’ regular shoe shine customers was BU President Daniel Marsh (STH 1908, Hon.’53).

Eleftherios and his wife, Anastasia, were Greek immigrants. After Eleftherios found work, they bought a modest house in Saugus and began a family. Chester, the oldest of their three children, was born in 1918.

Chester (CAS’47, LAW’47) was a handsome boy, and like his father, had ambitions. Aiming to attend an Ivy League school, he enrolled for a year of postsecondary work at Kents Hill Preparatory School in Maine, paying for the extra year of high school with money he had saved doing odd jobs. His plan worked: he was accepted to Princeton.

Then Eleftherios stepped in. He had never heard of this Princeton place, and he certainly wasn’t going to pay for Chester to go to school there. He insisted that Chester enroll at the local alternative—Boston University—and his reluctant son agreed. Then Eleftherios dropped the other shoe: he wasn’t much inclined to pay for BU, either.

Despite waiting tables and working other part-time jobs, after a time Chester couldn’t pay his tuition bill and couldn’t enroll for his next semester. Eleftherios shrugged off his son’s request for financial help. “You have troubles?” he asked. “Go see the president—a friend to me.”

Chester did that, brushing by a secretary who said he needed an appointment. “My name is Chester Parasco,” he boomed. “My father shines your shoes.” Marsh heard him out, then reached for a notepad and wrote, “Let this man move ahead.”

After interrupting his education to serve in the Army during World War II, earning a Bronze Star, Chester made up for lost time: he enrolled in the School of Law. He and former classmate Loretta Lynch (CAS’41) were married. At the 1947 Commencement, Chester received both undergraduate and law degrees and took a job with the legal department of an insurance company.

The Parascos and their newborn son, Chester, Jr., moved from veterans’ housing in Charlestown to a modest tract house in Walpole. After several years, Chester and a friend set up a law practice, Parasco and Levy, in downtown Boston. From his State Street office, he became involved with State House lobbyists and politicians, building a lucrative practice. “No one could work a room like my father,” recalls Chester, Jr., with a smile. “Nobody.”

In 1962, Chester, Sr., became assistant legal counsel to Massachusetts Governor Endicott Peabody. He turned his attention increasingly to politics and public service on the local level. He also stayed in touch with BU, attending the occasional reunion, and with his wife, making a series of small gifts to the University.

Loretta died in 1993 and Chester in August 2009. Chester included in his will a bequest of $150,000 to establish and endow the Chester and Loretta Parasco Scholarship Fund, to support students selected by the dean of Arts & Sciences. The only stipulation he made was that the students demonstrate both financial need and academic merit—conditions that Chester himself met on that long-ago day in the office of President Marsh.