**Sarah Cheng Bluish Video Transcript**

Patty Mah: Sarah, thank you for being part of this interview. We really, really appreciate it and, again, congratulations on gaining a deal with the Dragon’s Den and specifically, with Arlene Dickinson. We’d like to definitely get to know a little bit more about your career pathway and your entrepreneurial venture. Now that you know that you’ve got a deal, what are you next steps for Bluish?

Sarah Cheng: You know, after the pitch, and because Arlene extended an offer, there is a process to the whole. So, we’re working on that. But, you know, bigger picture, when I did the pitch, I went in, you know, with all my numbers, and I was ready for that kind of questioning. But the pitch took an interesting turn because Arlene was, you know, right there with me in terms of seeing the vision, and you know, the story of why and how I started Bluish. That called into, kind of, even more bigger picture questions, more than just, ‘How are you going to grow your business? What are you going to do next?’ There’s a lot of visioning that can and is happening right now. So, in terms of the next steps, we’re following through on that typical process but we’re also asking ourselves a lot of questions. Because if we were to pivot, you know, make Bluish really true to our story and what we’re about, right now is the time to do it. I’d say in the past few years, I’ve done well with the products that we have, which are primarily tutus for adults, like for women and matching mommy and mini. But, you know, as I’ve mentioned in the pitch, we’re more than that. So, that’s really what we’re working on right now. We’re visioning that bigger picture and, you know, where we want to take Bluish 5 years from now, or 10 years from now.

Patty Mah: Oh, fantastic, yeah, because in the episode, I think it was Arlene that had said that she loved the storytelling that was part of your venture and in the sense of capitalism for- with heart, and making money, because of the good that you’re doing so it’s great to hear that your, you and Arlene are starting to build on that and just help moving forward to look towards five years from now.

Sarah Cheng: Should I introduce the little guy that’s making all the noise?

Patty Mah: Yeah! Yeah, that would be great. Yeah, because in the episode, the little guy was still in your belly.

Sarah Cheng: Yeah, and like magic, here he is!

Patty Mah: Oh, what a cutie!

Sarah Cheng: He’s so big now. Well, he was also, like, my belly was also very big. I gave birth exactly one month after the pitch.

Patty Mah: Oh, wow!

Sarah Cheng: It was funny watching the pitch last night. I could not believe that he stayed in there for another month. Because he was so big already, like, I felt like I was wobbling in there at that point, with one more month to go.

Patty Mah: Oh, wow. And you definitely looked like you had very comfortable shoes on.

Sarah Cheng: Absolutely, exactly. Sorry, the producers who were working out the pitch, they wanted me to wear something matching with Summer, and I told them, “No, I can’t, I can’t, I totally cannot”, because I was pregnant at the time. I was like, “I usually wear it in a certain way, and I can’t even wear those shoes anymore, and I don’t even fit in our tutus.” So, anyway that’s a side story.

Patty Mah: Hahaha! So, with the funding and the deal that you received, so, what do you plan to use that funding toward? So, you had kind of intimated that with August being born, you may not be able to handle all of the tasks and the projects that are needed to launch the venture.

Sarah Cheng: So, yeah, with August, I think it’s just a reality with all parents, you know, whether you’re a mom or a father that’s having a newborn at home, it’s just going to take away, you know, some of your time and attention. And, for me, I feel, but aside from having a newborn at home, because it’s a phase, it’s more about freeing my time to think about those bigger questions and to work on pursuing those- the vision that we have. So, working on the content side, like for example, the editorial that we prepared, I’m just freeing up my time to put together, or you know, make that content and be creative, where I can make the most value to Bluish. We’ve actually already hired someone a few weeks ago, between the pitch and when August was born. We’ve brought someone on board to help us with just the day-to-day, managing fulfillments, and taking care of customers, and she was great. So, that is part of that plan to help free up my time so that I can pursue those, you know, that vision and creating content and really more storytelling because that’s what we’re about.

Patty Mah: Yeah, and that is. The storytelling and the content development is what truly helps to build your venture in more than just a, more than just a business, but rather, rather as a platform to help moms move forward from the baby blues, like you indicated. So, based on that, can you tell us where you got your inspiration from to start Bluish, and the name itself?

Sarah Cheng: My inspiration was really from, like, personal need. I, being a first-time mom, I was 29 at the time, and I had been, I graduated from AFM. I did that thing, I did the Master’s, I did my hours, I went through the firms and then I was in the industry. And, you know, the funny thing about motherhood is it just, it puts a stop to everything, and it’s quite abrupt. And because it was my first time, I was a new mom, I had no idea what to expect. And you kind of hear and you see all these happy stories about being a new mom and really enjoying having a newborn, all these pretty pictures. And, I could not imagine, I could not have imagined anything other than that. I thought it was going to be great. I had experienced a lot of success with my professional career at that point, and I thought, “Okay, well, this is another challenge. I’m gonna get through this the same way”, but no, it was completely different. It was hard, it was so hard. And it was hard, in that, I felt like I had no idea what to do. And the recovery was awful. I could not imagine that recovery would be that hard. Because with Summer, I had an amazing pregnancy. I had no sickness, and I felt pretty much myself. I did not feel heavy. And I worked, you know, I was in the firm until a pretty late stage into my pregnancy, and it was great, I thought, “Okay, I’m ready to have this baby”, and, you know, move on. But after having her, I felt like, oh gosh, I can’t move on, like, I didn’t know what to do. And I just felt like I was in this vicious cycle of struggles and everyday flew by so quickly, I had no idea what was happening, I felt like I was losing control. So, six months into a new motherhood, at that point, Summer was 6 months [old], and she can sit and she was no longer a newborn. I had a bit more time on my hands and I felt, well, you know what? What really, what really made it easier and what cheered me up when I was really just, I found myself in that vicious cycle, was just, you know, those simple things that broke that cycle and kind of took me out of that wreck for a bit, even if it was just momentary. So, you know, dressing her up, and matching with her, that was one of the things that just brought that simple kind of joy and broke that cycle, and so I thought, well, maybe I’m not alone. And so just based on a very simple thought like that, I thought, okay, well why don’t I do this? It will be a [maternity] leave project, see where it goes. And the other thing was when I went into developing the product, when I had looked for tutus for myself and her, I didn’t like what I found. In tutus for kids, they’re usually, they’re either puffy, which is great, that’s cute, but then the tulle to create that puffiness is often very rough, so I didn’t like that. But then when you go, you know, the other end of the spectrum, which is soft tulle, it kind of just sits there, it’s not puffy anymore, and I didn’t want that for her. I wanted it to be cute, but I wanted it to be soft. So, that’s exactly what our children’s tutus are like. They’re extremely soft but they’re also very puffy. So, that’s how I got the idea for that. And also, for myself. You know, post-partum, I thought I would, again in my mind, recover in a certain way and at a certain pace, but it didn’t turn out like that. So, I was like in 6 different sizes in 3 months. So, I felt, okay well, if I were to get something for myself, for a new mother to get something for herself, it can’t have a zipper closure, because that’s just so uncomfortable. And have no idea what size you’re going to be in a week from now. So, completely not practical. Our adult tutus, our women tulle skirts, have an elastic waistband. But when we get into that, you know, a lot of times when you look at tulle skirts in the market now, if they come with an elastic waistband, it’s usually like a lower grade, like you’re looking at a costume. You know, you can get a tutu from Party City. But, obviously, that’s not what we’re looking for here. So, I combined kind of a bridal quality kind of tulle and make of a tulle skirt but with an elastic waistband. So, that was, in my mind, the best of both worlds and then I created that product. So, that combination of a tulle skirt that works with mom, that looks good, that’s comfortable, and then with the mini version that’s great for your baby.

Patty Mah: I don’t know of any woman, or little girl, that wouldn’t say no to- that would say no to a tutu. So, I would love, love to get a tutu and I have been on the Bluish website and will probably purchase one for my own Christmas gift! Yeah, so, I love hearing the, the process that you went through, in terms of just what spurred you to create the tutus and the little mini tutus, in terms of matching for yourself and your daughter. As an aside, now that August is born, have you given any thought to maybe, perhaps expanding your product line to include something that would be for boy-persons?

Sarah Cheng: Yeah, so, that was the number question I got, actually, after having August. You know, friends and people who follow us on Instagram, they were excited about, you know, what we currently do, for our moms and girl-moms. They were like, “Oh, okay now that you’ve had a boy, are you going to be inspired and, you know, do something for our moms with boys?” And, yeah, I am inspired, but it might not be the way, in the way that a lot of people have it in their minds. It may not be a mom and a boy matching. But, you know, what I’ve learned from this experience of having a boy, rather than a girl this time, is really how similar and how different that experience can be. Whether, you know, the baby is a boy or a girl. From the mom’s perspective, you kind of go through a similar roller coaster of emotions and there are different things that may spark that joy and kind of break that right. But, you know, there are so many ways to break that cycle, to bring that momentary happiness. During the pitch, actually, Lane Merrifield, he also resonated with our story from the perspective of being a dad. It got edited out of the final pitch that aired, but he also shared, you know, from the perspective of a dad, you kind of, don’t know what to do, because you kind of feel like you don’t know how to help the new mom and the baby. You just want to help but you might be doing, you know, helping with the feeding or the burping. But you really don’t know how to bring the mom out of those emotions. So, all of that is to say, I think there are different ways to be true to our story and it doesn’t have to be with matching clothes or matching tutus.

Patty Mah: Yeah, and just having that platform for moms and dads to tell their stories is, I think, empowering enough. So, obviously, prior to starting Bluish, you had a very different career path than what you’re doing after. How has your career path changed since having been an undergrad and graduate student of the School of Accounting and Finance?

Sarah Cheng: Yeah! It’s interesting, you know, as I mentioned earlier, I did my undergrad in the AFM and then I did my Master’s, and I spent 10 years in the industry. So, I got my first job at KPMG and did consulting, and I did financial reporting and auditing. And then I moved to a small firm, which is where my husband is at now, MNP, I was there for a few years, in internal audit and consulting. And then, I did a stint, after I had Summer, at Irregulators. And then, I moved on to a real estate company, and that was really where I was before I decided to pursue something else. Sorry, can I get you to repeat the question again? I lost my train of thought!

Patty Mah: Oh, sure! Yeah, no problem. How has your career path changed? And I’ll add an additional question to that which might help lead into what you’re naturally going to start to talk about anyways is, how do you think your education within the SAF has prepared you for your entrepreneurial venture?

Sarah Cheng: Starting your own business, I think, especially like Bluish, it’s very different from, you know, my firm days, or being in the corporate world where a lot of is bound by delivery. And delivering per a specific set of expectations. So, like, in the firm, we have engagement letters, and we have a certain way to conduct an audit, and we have a certain way to do reporting. A lot of it is already, like prescribed. Of course, there is room for creativity because, you know, how you manage your client, how you deal with them and how you propose solutions. Obviously, there’s a lot of variation there. But, you know, by enlarge, what you’re expected to deliver is there. With Bluish, I found, you know, there is really no, absolutely no manual. There is no one to tell you what the expectations are and no one to tell you when something is due. You can take years to do something, you can take days. It’s really up to your own judgement and the pace that you want to go. And, you know, aligning opportunities with your capabilities, that’s a big part of starting or running your own business. But, I think, when you’re working against a job post or job description, that’s often not in that, you know, expectations. So, that was a huge pivot, for me. In terms of how my accounting background prepared me, I think it’s, you know, for me, financial literacy and the numbers, they come naturally. I think a big part of it is my training in accounting, I mean I’ve spent 10 plus years, auditing and looking at numbers, and also trying to simplify the complexity, to cut through that complexity, right? Because if you think about doing an audit, there’s obviously a lot of detail there. But how do you perform all of the procedures, tell through all the details and then deliver a certain solution into the client. That takes a lot of skill and understanding in what you’re dealing with. In accounting, naturally it’s all about numbers. But, you know, with Bluish, I found myself being able to apply those skills, like my understanding with financials and then also being able to kind of pick out the stories, you know? And lead, whether it is clients or customers, to focus on what that story is. I think that storytelling piece is very consistent. So, you know, being in accounting has prepared me in so many ways. My understanding of finances to storytelling to really even being able to speak, right? In accounting we’ve had to speak a lot to clients. To people way higher up, who know a lot more and then as a consultant or an auditor, you know, you have to go there and present your findings, and tell them what they’re not doing so well. It’s incredibly intimidating! So, all of that training, I feel, has also prepared me very well, in particular for this pitch because, you know, obviously very intimidating to walk in there and especially because Bluish has been so personal for me, to stand in front of the Dragons to talk about the business. I think I drew a lot on- from my skills developed in the accounting world to stay calm and stay coherent as much as I could. So, that’s how it prepared me.

Patty Mah: Excellent! Thank you. So, obviously, in the amount of time that you started your entrepreneurial journey, there must’ve been some significant highlights or moments of success that really stood out to you. What were some of those, obviously, in addition to pitching to the Dragon’s Den?

Sarah Cheng: I have been having a lot of flashbacks, lately, because in anticipation of the pitch and last night. If I think back to, you know, when we started, again based on a very simple thought, and I thought, “Okay, well the first thing I want to do is get in front of people.” And at the time, I wasn’t very good at social media, I mean I’m not very good at it right now, but at the time I was completely new to social media, I didn’t even have an Instagram account. So, I thought, “Okay, I’m going to bring it in front of people in a way that I know how, which is in person,” so we did a baby show. And when we were at the baby show, I guess some people noticed us. One of those people was in probably charge of another baby show. So, we did our second baby show. Someone contacted us and said, “Hey, we want to feature you on Breakfast Television,” and we had literally just started, I did not even have a website at the time. So, I thought, okay, that’s great! Right? We did, we kind of blindly did our second one. We had already been on Breakfast Television and people were trying to find us, but we had not website. So, people couldn’t find us! But when we did our second show, some people came up to us and said, “Hey, we tried to look for you, but we couldn’t find you,” and that really prompted us to get on with that online presence. And then at the same time, we also met a few more people at that show and one of those really important contacts were Pottery Barn Kids. So, they connected with us because we were featured side by side on BT, and then when we did our second show, they also popped up there. So, they came by to say hi, incredibly nice team. We still stay in touch. And then they invited us to pop up in their store, in Pottery Barn Kids, in Yorkdale. And they were like, “Yeah, you can pretty much come whenever, you can stay for as long as you want,” like, it was amazing. Because, you know, like I was new to the scene, but I had never heard of any other shop being able to pop up in Pottery Barn Kids, and they were so friendly and supportive. They gave us pretty much an 8-by-8 or 10-by-10 space, like right in front of the store, I mean at the front of the entrance. So, it was amazing, they were so generous. So, when I think back to highlights, it’s really examples like this where I just, on my part, I just put one foot in front of the other and I just did what I knew and could at the time. And then just staying open minded and other very nice people, very kind people then reached out to me. So, I think those were, those are the highlights when I think back. You know, meeting those people, and being just so genuine.

Patty Mah: Yeah, and definitely building that network of just like-minded people, which is fantastic. Those highlights, the highlights and the stories that you’ve told are definitely demonstrations of… makes me feel good to know that there’s great people out there and that believe in products and storytelling, such as this story that you’re telling through Bluish. So, bringing you back to the Dragon’s Den experience, how was your experience in preparing for the pitch but then also having your daughter, Summer, join you at that pitch. She’s so cute!

Sarah Cheng: When it came to her, there’s really no preparing! She- bringing her there was risky. You have no idea how a 5-year-old would decide to act. You know, on the day, we made sure she was fed, we bought her a toy just before the pitch to keep her in a good mood. She was just herself when she was there, and she was fantastic. In terms of myself, like how to prepare, when I first got the news, it was maybe a little bit more than a month, maybe 5 weeks or so before the pitch. Yeah. So, I was very surprised. I really wasn’t expecting it. And, all of a sudden, it was like, well, how do you prepare? I was asking myself the same question. I shared last night on our live that one of the first things that we did was clean up our numbers. Because even though both of us are accountants, after starting Bluish, I realized that last thing I want to do is the books, really. So, that’s what we did, we cleaned up our numbers, we got help from a bookkeeper actually to help clean up those numbers, get our tax filing straight so that we could calculate ratios from the actual numbers. Be truthful and be able to tell “what is the genuine story here?” – through numbers. Other than that, we started asking ourselves – and I say “we” because, even though this is completely my venture, my husband is a very important founding board and we debated all the time about what Bluish is and what it should be, my vision in 5 years or 10 years, because I do need that voice, you know? You can’t just talk to yourself all the time. Anyway. So, we asked ourselves a lot of important questions. Like, exactly what I shared, in 5 years, 10 years, what do I want to see? What is true to how I feel about Bluish, would I be comfortable in telling people, “Hey, this is what Bluish means,” even if that would mean more growth. Would that be true to what I believe in and what I’m comfortable in? We did a lot of debate over that and then at the end of it, we married what I wanted Bluish to be, with then the numbers. And that’s how really, we formulated my pitch and also all the responses to the questions that we expected the Dragons to ask. One other thing that I did was I got a life coach to help me put myself in the right mindset. Because it came as such a surprise and there wasn’t a lot of time to prepare. I felt like I needed a very concentrated amount of thinking and there was really no time for my mind to be, to think thoughts that were unproductive, or set me back, or made things harder than they already were. And you have to remember, at the time, I was 8-months pregnant, when I got the news, so, my hormones and my emotions were all over the place. So, I felt like, okay, I have to be really focused for the next few weeks. There’s a lot to think through and to prepare for here. So, my life coach is actually – or business coach – is actually a classmate of mine. She’s also from AFM, yeah, we were from the same year as well, so also class of ’08. And we actually worked at KPMG together when we first came out of school. So, we go way back, and she started her own business and decided to leave, and she’s now in coaching. Anyway, so I reached out to her, and we hit it off right away and we got to coaching right away. And that really helped to put myself in that mindset.

Patty Mah: Excellent, yeah! That sounds like a fantastic journey. Seems to have been, like, really quick journey, 5 weeks from knowing that you are going to be on Dragon’s Den and actually pitching, and then a month after, having August.

Sarah Cheng: Yeah, exactly!

Patty Mah: So, would you encourage other entrepreneurs to seek opportunities like going and pitching to the Dragon’s Den.

Sarah Cheng: Yes, absolutely! Whether it is Dragon’s Den or some other opportunity that forces – or I shouldn’t say force – but pushes you and challenges you to really ask those questions to, you know, challenge, whether the status quo is where you want to go and if it’s the right direction for your business. Any kind of opportunity that does that, I think, is so beneficial because as an entrepreneur, there’s just so much to do and so little time in a day that it’s hard to always see clearly, right? There’s just so many blind spots. And if you’re the only – like if you’re working at it alone – on a lot of days I’m just barely, I feel like keeping my neck above the water, right? I’m trying to keep afloat. Like I’m operating, I’m fulfilling and marketing and talking to customers. It’s really hard to be like, hey, I need to take a step back and ask these really hard questions. And then I would have a much better idea of where to take the business and be more strategic about everything. It’s hard when you’re alone and there’s no external force pushing you to do that, so, it’s so easy to get into that slippery slope and feel comfortable with the day-to-day, which is okay if that’s what you’re looking to do. But if you want a more strategic direction in growing or, you know, may not necessarily be growing, but just taking your business in a certain direction, that you do need that separation from that day-to-day, and you do need that challenge. In my case, I thought it was great. The pitch was a definite, you know, kind of end to that process that I have to be, now, accountable for what I’m saying to everyone, all the Dragons and everyone who will be watching.

Patty Mah: That was actually my last question to you- for you. But, what I did what to ask is, the narrative that you also presented at Dragon’s Den, along with the gifts that you had provided to each Dragon. The little narrative book that you provided is a beautiful, beautiful narrative. Certainly surprised, I was surprised as much as the Dragons were surprised that you produced that yourself, which, to me, really helps to launch Bluish in more than the platform of product but also, but also the storytelling and that narrative and providing a platform for moms and potentially dads too, to talk about sometimes the challenges of being new moms and being new dads.

Sarah Cheng: Yeah, absolutely. Visuals are important in conveying any story, so, you’re very welcome to use that.

Patty Mah: Well, thank you, thank you so much, Sarah! I don’t want to take up anymore of your time, because I know with a new baby and Christmas coming up, we really do appreciate, really, really do appreciate you taking the time to meet with us to talk about your entrepreneurial journey. It’s a fantastic story and we’re super proud and super happy to be helping you to tell that story.