

Omelets with Shaniq



Shaniq, one of the participants of the Healthy Choice Food Box Program, tells us her unique story and experience through social context, a component of the social determinants of health, while making an omelet for us to enjoy.

“Love always wins.”

Shaniq shared this quote by her best friend Kristine to describe the feelings that motivate her through life and a belief she holds to be the universal truth. Shaniq is a participant in the Healthy Choice Food Box (HCFB) program by Denver Food Rescue (DFR). This program started in the summer of 2021 and has provided free food deliveries to 300 families throughout the city of Denver. This program's main intention is to assist individuals experiencing transportation barriers to access free food through deliveries. Although Shaniq doesn't face the same transportation barriers as some of the families in the program, her experience is one of many that have shaped and molded the program. Shaniq shares her story with us while whipping up a delicious omelet.

The items in the box change periodically depending on seasonality and availability; each is fresh with a focus on local producers and farms. On the day we spoke with her, Shaniq utilized some of the produce from Box 1: tomatoes, onions, and microgreens to make an omelet. An omelet is a folded egg dish that is primarily filled with vegetables and sometimes protein sources like turkey or ham.

“I think breakfast is the most important meal of the day, and even though I wish I was better at it, I do understand that it is important,” The omelet has been a staple in Shaniq’s kitchen since her children were young. She started making them because they were a fast breakfast choice that could be filled with any ingredients. Shaniq says it best: “There are no rules set forth for an omelet. You can put whatever you want in it.”

Although her children enjoy this dish, it wasn’t Shaniq’s traditional breakfast growing up. Her grandparents, who raised her, made grand family spreads for breakfast. These meals were large and time-consuming. Her grandparents were the first to ignite her interest in cooking, “I was so intrigued by these smells and all these colors that my grandparents would put together, and I’m just like okay, when I grow up I want to know how to cook.” But the reality of cooking while raising her children proved to be a little more challenging.

As Shaniq got older, the look of meal time changed. “Thirty minutes, that’s what I learned ... when my kids were younger I was a full-time single parent, ya know. I had to get home, I had to have them do dinner, homework, bed. So, it was like, how can we still spend time together but shorten the time?” She adapted by taking cooking lessons, provided by her kids’ school, and learned to master quicker meals. This style of cooking ensured that her family were still eating nutritious meals together.

Although meal making became a quicker process, Shaniq emphasized spending time with her loved ones in and around the kitchen. This was a value her family emphasized. “Back in the day, family was more oriented ... I still try to have a party, have a get-together, something for the family and bring them over ‘cause I still want to hold onto that memory and that love for me.” This *love* she describes in and out of the kitchen with her family became a pivotal foundation for how Shaniq raised her kids and overcame her obstacles.

“I’ve had to overcome a lot, but I mean everyone goes and overcomes obstacles. It’s just how do you grow through them and then your reaction you give to them.” Shaniq was raised with her grandparents and extended family because her parents were not able to support her at that time. Her parents were impacted by the 1980’s drug epidemic. The dysfunctional and discriminatory system of the 1980’s brought much turmoil [to the African-American community through increased policing and the intentional creation of an environment of drug abuse.](#) Although the reality of her experience was challenging, Shaniq does not hold malice towards her parents—she loves them intensely— and wants her children to know that.

Shaniq shows her children unconditional love for her mom and teaches her children this value and ability to share love with everyone. “Showing my kids like, ‘Hey ya know, her mom wasn’t there for her, but look on how she loves her mom no matter what.’ Ya know, love on your people, the community, your teacher, your friends, your cousins...” These lessons of love came through Shaniq’s individual experience appreciating herself and her ability.

“For me I didn't give up on myself.” Shaniq’s strength pushed her to find solace in herself by appreciating these experiences. She credits challenging moments as being pivotal to her true character. “I can’t hold my past struggles against anyone. I feel that I'm actually thankful for those struggles. The things I've been through, I wouldn't be the person that I am today, this loving person, this courageous person who gives.” Shaniq has been able to give through this mentality to many, including her children. She created through her actions an environment that is supportive, stable, and secure. She has sought this security and normalcy in places like her housing.

For sixteen years now, Shaniq has called Five Points her home. It has been the place her children have grown and become adults. Although she has been able to create a secure home here, the neighborhood itself has changed a lot since her arrival. “I been living in my home since I was six months pregnant with my daughter [who is sixteen] ... When I first moved here... I was judged, like, ‘Oh you live in the hood.’ You know, who would have thought fifteen years later it was gentrified.”

Five Points, was known as [“the Harlem of the West”](#) once a bustling epicenter for Black musicians attracting the likes of Dizzy Gillespie, Billie Holiday, Miles Davis and more. This neighborhood has experienced drastic changes since then because of gentrification. [Gentrification is the process by which a neighborhood changes to accommodate economic investment to a historically disinvested community while changing its demographics and culture.](#) Five Points has seen shifts in its economic integrity including revitalization and housing with drastic changes to its racial make-up.

The housing market in Five Points has accommodated investment by increasing housing and rent prices. [Rent in this neighborhood has increased from an average of \\$1,015 in 2015 \(2015 inflation-adjusted to 2020 dollars\) to an average of \\$1,319 in 2020.](#) Meanwhile the amount of households experiencing housing cost-burdens is at about 36.2 percent (CO Equity Compass). Those displaced by these changes are typically Black and Brown households first.

[In 2010, about 19.6 percent of the neighborhood of Five Points was self identified as Black or African American. In 2020, that number is now at about 12.2 percent.](#) This cultural and economic shift changed the community infrastructure for those in and around the community. Although Shaniq has been able to stay in this neighborhood, she and her family still face challenges of those outside her security.

Shaniq’s children are one of her many prides and joys. They are versions of herself that move through this world supported by her in all efforts. Her daughter is a prideful, unabashed individual, conscious and respectful of others. Shaniq sees herself in her daughter's mannerisms and laughs at how much she is like herself. Shaniq’s son is also prideful, kind, and generous just like his mother. Each child is unique yet similarly bonded and molded by their mother. These children are lights that bring Shaniq insurmountable levels of joy *and* fear.

Shaniq and her children are Black in America, and this truth alone brings fear to her. This past year alone, we have seen an up-tic in violence towards Black and Brown bodies by police and the government at unprecedented rates. This in itself brings Shaniq fear for her children, especially her son. “I have a 20-year-old son, he's a Black male, I'm a single parent. I didn't really have a great male role model for my

son, so I had to teach him everything. I'm scared that when he walks out the door everyday that something might happen ... I might have missed teaching him something, and he goes out into the world, and he's himself, and he's not accepted." This fear is a reality created by the white supremacist system in the United States of America that has existed since its inception. These systemic injustices reach into all realms of society affecting cultural, social, economic, and political arenas.

To be Black in America and especially a Black male in America makes one disproportionately unsafe. This society has created and continues to support discriminatory practices that have disproportionately affected Black and Brown people. [The police have harmed and murdered Black people at a rate 3.5 times higher than white people, and have killed Latinx and Indigenous peoples at a higher rate as well.](#) With this in mind, we can see how Shaniq's fears are larger than a singular point; they're an everyday unknown that is determined by others' interpretations of her and her children.

Although these fears cannot be fully diminished without substantial systematic efforts that need to come at the [federal, political, cultural, and historical level](#), Shaniq does have hope for her children and others. She has raised her children with care and attention to their being. Shaniq's efforts have created children whom she is proud of. "I know that I do great things, and I've taught them great things, and they're going to be great people giving back to the world like their mom." In the smallest and most miniscule moments she has even been able to see herself, and all her glorific work, in their ability to be themselves. "For the most part you don't see those great qualities, but in these small impressionable moments, that true character of yourself comes out of your kids, and that is a proud moment for a parent."

Aside from being a great parent, she has been able to create considerable waves in her community and support others through her experience. She teaches other women love and strength. She started a clothing line, Neighborhood Home Girl, to support other women who have been through similar experiences and to empower themselves through their struggles. Her clothing line quote is "Through the hood, the bad and the ugly, she stays solid." Shaniq through all her experiences continues to rise and shake all that's underneath her. She makes sure to let others know that she is more than these stories and experiences.

She explained it best, "I'm a badass, ya know. I'm a badass woman out here doing badass things. I'm a woman of resource; if you need anything, I'm a person you come to in confidence. Not only do I reach out to support systems, I'm a supporter of the community." As well as supporting women through her clothing line, she's a teacher, artist, and avid member of The Green House Center.

The [Green House Center](#) supports the arts with activism for healing, connection, education and transformation. She utilizes her creativity to teach children environmental awareness and how to support environmental relationships with the Earth. She has supported the youth in Denver and continues to provide resources for children, the community, and her family. Her passion and love have guided her very far, and she continues to pursue larger efforts to ensure that the community is seen and heard.

"My true life, light, is to be able to give abundantly to the community ... I want to give back through art, through music, through fashion, through food, through community." Her vision is to create a space where people can feel like family, sharing their truths, while feeling safe in community with each other. Her experiences, although not her full story, paint a beautiful picture of who and what she is to this world. Her

message for everyone is to believe in yourself and ability. “Whatever you put your heart to, whatever you want to do, do it. Do everything you want to do that makes you happy ... What you put into the world is what you get back.” Shaniq has achieved plenty and supported others tenfold with this mentality, we look forward to hearing what her next endeavors will bring.

This program has been an opportunity to continue supporting individuals like Shaniq and other families experiencing any challenges and we acknowledge the work is not done. We thank Shaniq for her time with this project and for sharing her story with us all.

Omelet Recipe

Ingredients:

3 eggs
1 diced tomato
1 diced onion
1 small handful of spinach (or any leafy greens)
1 teaspoon of butter or oil
Pinch of salt
Pinch pepper
Pinch of seasoning salt
Pinch of garlic salt
Optional: Use any meat (Shaniq used cut-up turkey lunch meat)
Sprinkle of cheddar cheese

Instructions:

1. Chop the veggies and optional meat of choice and set aside.
2. Heat a pan on medium with a teaspoon of butter (or oil).
3. Whisk together in a bowl the eggs and seasonings.
4. Pour eggs into the heated pan and cook without stirring until the edges begin to set. Push the edges toward the center of the pan and tilt the pan so the uncooked eggs move to the edge. Once the eggs are a little more set (about 2 minutes), place in the vegetables and protein and cook for about another 2 minutes.
5. Flip over the eggs and let cook for about 2 more minutes.
6. Plate and top with cheese. Feel free to freestyle your toppings and add things like guacamole and salsa.