The mystery behind Jackie Kennedy’s problem pregnancies

Talking to myself about Jackie Kennedy’s pregnancies:

I: I need your help.
Me: Bring it on.
I: How many pregnancies did Jackie Kennedy have?
Me: Five that we know of.
I: Are you sure?
Me: Want a list?
I: Okay. Show me your list.
Me: Jackie married Senator John F. Kennedy on September 12, 1953. She was 24, and he was 36. Late in 1955 and three months into her first pregnancy, Jackie suffered a miscarriage.
I: Next.
Me: By January, 1956, Jackie was pregnant again. Meanwhile her husband, a notorious womanizer, was fooling around with the likes of Audrey Hepburn, actress Lee Remick, and stripper Tempest Storm.
I: I’ll forget you said that. Keep going.
Me: The morning of August 23, 1956, Jackie started bleeding. By now she was roughly 36 weeks pregnant. She was staying with her mother in Newport while her husband was cruising the Mediterranean with some pals and a boat load of women. Jackie was rushed to the hospital where she underwent an emergency cesarean section in a desperate attempt to save the baby.
I: Did they?
Me: Unfortunately, no. The baby ran out of oxygen and was stillborn. They named her Arabella.
The mystery behind Jackie Kennedy’s problem pregnancies

I: How about her next pregnancy?
Me: May I add one more thing?
I: Of course, bro.
Me: Three days after Arabella was stillborn, JFK’s partyboat reached port, and he got the news. At first, he told Jackie he wasn’t cutting the cruise short. But Senator Smathers of Florida, who was also on the boat, gave him this advice: “You better get your (blank) back there right away if you plan on staying married – or on getting to the White House.” So, JFK rushed home.
I: Was he in shock or just too calloused?
Me: A little of both, perhaps.
I: Next.
Me: By March of the following year, Jackie was pregnant again. On November 27, 1957, she gave birth by cesarean section to a seven pound, two ounce girl at New York’s Lying-in Hospital. This time, when the anesthesia wore off and Jackie came to, her husband brought the baby in to see her. They named her Caroline.
I: Finally, a healthy baby and an attentive husband too.
Me: Yep.
I: Keep going.
Me: May I add one more thing?
I: Make it short.
Me: Jackie later told friends that the day Caroline was born was the happiest day of her life. She had proven to herself and to the Kennedy clan that she was not too fragile to give birth. And she was more than first lady material, she was also mother material.
I: So the pressure was off.
Me: Somewhat. Early in 1960, Jackie was pregnant again. But within weeks after JFK won the presidential election, Jackie started bleeding and gave birth by emergency cesarean section. John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Jr. was born several weeks early on November 25, 1960 at Georgetown University Hospital. He weighed six pounds, three ounces and spent his first six days of life in an incubator.
I: So when JFK took office on January 20, 1961, John-John was only eight weeks old?

Me: Right you are, big fella. May I add one more thing?

I: Why not.

Me: John Jr. grew up and became a lawyer and magazine publisher. He and his wife and his wife’s sister died on July 16, 1999 when a plane he was piloting crashed into the ocean, off Martha’s Vineyard.

I: And Jackie Kennedy’s last pregnancy?

Me: Early in 1963, Jackie Kennedy was pregnant again, forcing her to curtail her official duties as First Lady. On the outs with her husband, she spent most of the summer at Hyannis Port until she started bleeding and went into labor five-and-a-half-weeks early. Their son, Patrick, was born by emergency cesarean section on August 7, 1963 at Otis Air Force Base Hospital on Cape Cod. Weighing four pounds and ten ounces, Patrick had difficulty breathing and was rushed by ambulance to Children’s Hospital in Boston. He died 40 hours after birth.

I: So, out of five pregnancies, we have one miscarriage, one stillbirth, one premature newborn death, and two healthy survivors, one of whom (John-John) died 11 years ago when he was 38, right?

Me: Right. May I add one more thing?

I: Of course.

Me: On November 22, 1963, some 15 weeks after Patrick died, JFK was shot in the head and killed by Lee Harvey Oswald in Dallas, Texas.

I: Thank you for the reminder. Say, I have a thought.

Me: Fire away.

I: Jackie Kennedy smoked up to three packs a day all her adult life, including her pregnancies. I wonder if her smoking contributed to her problem pregnancies, along with the chronic stress.

Me: We know cigarette smoking reduces blood flow to the placenta, and oxygen to the fetus. It also increases the chance that the placenta will separate from the uterus, bringing
on vaginal bleeding and premature labor. She had these problems with at least four of her five pregnancies.

I: We also know that negative life events and long-lasting stress may trigger premature birth and low birthweight babies.

Me: It sure makes sense, bro. Good thought.